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### Routes of Remembrance

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**Bayo Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance: refashioning the slave trade in Ghana*. Chicago IL and London: Chicago University Press (pb \ \$21.00, £11.00 – 0 226 34976 4). 2008, 272 pp.**

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that together create new semantic structures constituting a single world, albeit one that is experienced differently in different places, even within Uganda itself.

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BAYO HOLSEY, *Routes of Remembrance: refashioning the slave trade in Ghana*. Chicago IL and London: Chicago University Press (pb \$21.00, £11.00 – 0 226 34976 4). 2008, 272 pp.

*Routes of Remembrance* focuses on how memories of the slave trade are constructed in the coastal Ghanaian towns of Cape Coast and Elmina. These towns, once busy ports of commerce through which the trans-Atlantic slave trade operated, have now developed into popular tourist destinations for those interested in the history of the trade. The towns' castles, dating from the early European presence, and their dungeons, the final point of departure for slaves sold into the Middle Passage, attract many African-American visitors who see an opportunity to search for, and celebrate, their African roots. The public discussion of the slave trade amongst African-Americans contrasts sharply with the silence of the local residents of these towns. Slavery is seldom discussed in these coastal communities because the subject is perceived to hold a potential for de-legitimizing the positions of descendants of assimilated slaves and threatening family and community cohesion. The development of diaspora tourism has placed the local residents in an uncomfortable position: they are now forced to confront their ancestors' agency in enslaving and removing people from Africa, and it is the descendants of those removed who have placed them in this bind. This has drawn them, reluctantly, into a dialogue on the subject, which for them was normally not approached directly. *Routes of Remembrance* seeks to uncover how the slave trade is now understood by these local residents in the light of both this dialogue and the active promotion of this form of tourism by the Ghanaian government.

The last decade has seen much scholarly literature concerned with how information about slavery and the slave trade has been transmitted over the generations in various West African societies. For example, Rosenthal, Shaw and Baum detail how associated anxieties are articulated amongst the Ewe (Togo), Temne (Sierra Leone) and Diola (Senegal) respectively. These and many other studies focus mainly on African agency, but Holsey prefers to look at the subject from 'within the geographies provided by theories of postcolonialism as well as those provided by theories of the black Atlantic' (p. 14). This allows for an examination of how both colonialism and the slave trade may shape contemporary African subjectivities, producing a refreshingly new angle. Holsey then moves away from interrogating the workings of collective, public or ritual memories, through arguing that information on the slave trade has been 'sequestered' spatially and temporally, producing a multiplicity of often conflicting discourses. For the local residents, knowledge about the slave trade is gained from a number of institutions, as well as from social experiences. These include: a government-sponsored Pan-African event (PANAFEST) that celebrates the homecoming of Africans in the diaspora; visits to the castle museums; conversations with African-American tourists; Ghanaian history text books, and family histories. The book is broadly divided into two parts: the first – chapters 1 to 5 – looks at certain arenas which local

residents use to sequester the history of the slave trade; the second – chapters 6 and 7 – looks at centring the slave trade in terms of the current re-negotiation of its history due to the diaspora tourism industry.

Holsey's central thesis is that national discourses about slavery and the slave trade, constructed through educational and public bodies, are at odds with perceptions formed through conversations with African-American visitors, while also contradicting locally constructed ideas on the subject. The official Ghanaian version of the slave trade, as represented by Ghanaian text books and the castle museums, celebrates 'black' success stories in both Africa and the Americas, equating the experience of colonialism in Ghana with the experience of slavery in the Americas. But ordinary Ghanaians have some difficulty relating the two sets of experiences. Holsey suggests that there needs to be a rethinking of how this history is presented in Ghana, in order for the slave trade to serve as an empowering discourse on both sides of the Atlantic. She convincingly argues that public discussion, sparked by the trans-Atlantic dialogue concerning the slave trade, has led to an awareness of Africa's marginalization in the global order, and, she further suggests, discourses about the slave trade have now come to function as protest narratives for local youth *vis-à-vis* the post-colonial condition. Throughout the book, Holsey presents fascinating, detailed ethnographic data – conversations, interviews and life histories of a range of local individuals. Although the ethnography has an immediate character, with much discussion of informants' attitudes and opinions, it can be rather difficult to read at times, often demanding cross-referencing to previous chapters. In stating that the African diaspora has the ability to question the assumptions made by European histories of Africa, Holsey, nonetheless, often finds it difficult not to present her arguments through the same problematic binary oppositions – white/black, oppressor/oppressed, colonizer/colonized, throughout this book. These are minor points, however, in a book which is an extremely valuable addition to the scholarship of Africa, the anthropology of slavery, and Atlantic studies.

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BENEDETTA ROSSI (ed.), *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African trajectories*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press (hb £65 – 978 1 846 31199 4) 2009, 254 pp.

La problématique de *Reconfiguring Slavery* vise, au-delà de la période post-abolitionniste du début du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle, à restituer les contours actuels des anciennes relations serviles dans diverses sociétés d'Afrique de l'Ouest. Le colloque à l'origine de ce travail s'était donné pour objectif de comprendre les dynamiques contemporaines des avatars serviles grâce à l'élaboration de nouveaux concepts. Les neuf contributions réunies dans le livre, relevant à la fois de l'histoire et de l'anthropologie, s'essaient à relever ce défi. La notion de trajectoire telle qu'elle est envisagée ici ambitionne de retracer les transformations subies par l'ancienne institution servile dans un processus continu de recompositions sociales et de libération progressive, dont Urs Peter Ruf a montré ailleurs qu'il pouvait être sans fin. Les trajectoires suivies par les descendants d'esclaves – et par ceux des anciens maîtres – peuvent varier selon des critères pluri-ethniques au sein d'une même formation sociale